



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

Region One
490 North Meridian Rd.
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 752-5501
FAX: 406-257-0349
Ref:DV034-02
January 23, 2002

TO: Environmental Quality Council, Capitol Building, Helena, 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Planning, Prevention & Assistance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Permitting Compliance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Director's Office - Larry Peterman
Legal Unit

Parks Division - Walt Timmerman

Dennis W. Dupuis, Fire Management Officer, Tribal Forestry Department, 104 Main St. SE, Ronan, 49864
Montana Historical Society, SHPO, 225 North Roberts, Veteran's Memorial Building, Helena, 59620-1201
Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800
Jim Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624
George Ochenski, PO Box 689, Helena, 59624
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation, PO Box 728, Libby, 59923
Montana State Parks Association, PO Box 699, Billings, 59103
Joe Gutkoski, President, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, 59715
Rep. Joey Jayne, 299 Lumpry Road, Arlee, 59821-9747
Rep. John Brueggeman, 321 Lakeview Drive, Polson, 59860-9317
Rep. Elaine Sliter, PO Box 118, Somers, 59932-0118
Rep. Stanley Fisher, 76 Golf Terrace Dr., Bigfork, 59911-0697
Sen. Bob Keenan, Box 697, Bigfork, 59911-0697
Sen. Mike Taylor, Box 152, Proctor, 59929-0152
Bob Raney, 212 S. 6th, Livingston, 59047
Lake County Commissioners, 106 Fourth Avenue East, Polson, 59860
Flathead County Commissioners, 800 S Main Street, Kalispell, 59901

Ladies and Gentlemen:

State Parks

Fish, Wildlife & Parks has completed an environmental assessment for the **Wild Horse Island** proposed applied fire project. The project proposes to implement an applied fire demonstration project within Wild Horse Island's approximately 1,100 acres of Palouse prairie and Ponderosa pine habitat. This would be a pilot project to determine the feasibility and success of using applied fire as a management tool on the island.

There were a total of twenty-one letters and e-mails with comments on the project, all of which are addressed in the decision document. There were no changes to the draft EA; therefore, the draft becomes the final EA. A copy of the decision document is enclosed. Please direct your questions or comments to Dave Landstrom, Park Operations Supervisor, FWP, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901, or e-mail dlandstrom@state.mt.us. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Daniel P. Vincent
Regional Supervisor

Lake

DV/nli
Enclosure

c: Polson City Library, PO Box 820, Polson, 59860
 Flathead County Library, 247 First Avenue E, Kalispell, 59901
 Flathead County Library, PO Box 472, Bigfork, 59911
 Stephen Barrett, 995 Ranch Lane, Kalispell, 59901
 Jim Weatherly, WGM Group, 3021 Palmer, PO Box 16027, Missoula, 59808
 Greg Poncin, DNRC, 2250 Highway 93 North, Kalispell, 59901
 Robert Harrington, RTSB, PO Box 173220, Bozeman, 59718
 Flathead Lakers, PO Box 70, Polson, 59860
 Chris Peterson, PO Box 189, Columbia Falls, 59912
 Larry Copenhaver, Conservation Director, MT Wildlife Federation, PO Box 1175, Helena, 59624
 Bill Myers, c/o Pointer Scenic Cruises, 452 Grand Drive, Bigfork, 59911
 Tom Power, 920 Evans Avenue, Missoula, 59801
 Stan Frasier, MT Wildlife Federation, Box 1175, Helena, 59624
 Lisa Bennett, Box 842, Wilson, WY 83014
 Chris Field, Box 191, Dayton, 59914
 Tom Howard, PO Box 570, Oceanside, CA 92054
 Petie Bennett, PO Box 33, Wilsow, WY 83014
 Mark Field, 1057 Mooring Road, Columbia Falls, 59912
 Calvin & Lois Hubbard, 406 3rd Avenue E, Polson, 59860
 Joe & Barbara Bentley, 2571 Sageway, Salt Lake City, UT 84109
 Jim & Shelly Francisconi, 2230 NE Alameda, Portland, OR 97212
 Duncan Hubbard, 750 Big Flat Road, Missoula, 59801
 John Brusati, 12365 105th Place, Kirkland, WA 98034
 David & Sheila Gardner, 2441 Iron Canyon Drive, Park City, UT 84060
 Kirk Hubbard, #12 1 Abbey Road, London NW8 9DE, UK
 Rosalia Brusati, 134 Green Meadow Way, Palo Alto, CA 94306
 Barry Gordon, PO Box 1376, Polson, 59860
 Bill & Kathe Johnson, 10410 US Hwy 10 W, Missoula, 59802
 Margaret Coons 9½ 5th Avenue W, Polson, 59860
 Nancy Gordon, 371 Park Circle Drive, Polson, 59860
 Ronald MacDonald, 1950 Alvina Drive, Missoula, 59802
 David & Karen Gardner Dee, 1845 Yalecrest Avenue, Salt Lake City, UT 84108
 Hank & Nancy Harrington, 1510 Khanabad Drive, Missoula, 59802
 Dona MacDonald & Steve Boyd, 3507 46th Avenue NE, Seattle, WA 98105
 Dee & Florie DiMatteo, 363 Boca Raton Court, Walnut Creek, CA 94598
 Jeff Holter, 1101 Friedlander Drive, Aberdeen, WA 98520
 Scott MacDonald, 4565 157th Avenue SE, Bellevue, WA 98006
 Mel & Sunnie Dobson, Box 2177, Big Arm, 59910
 John Holter, East 3818 Congress Street, Spokane, WA 99223
 Buzz & Jane MacCarter, 2884 Plaza Blanca, Santa Fe, NM 87505
 Ken Emerson, 1305 W Diamond, Butte, 59701
 James Howard, 18350 Morgan Lane, Frenchtown, 59834
 Justin & Jill Manson, 6 St. Leonards Terrace, London SW3 4QA, UK
 Kristin & Kenneth Murphy, 519 Dixon Avenue, Missoula, 59801
 Peter & Leah Talbot, 1501 Dickson Street, Missoula, 59802
 Bruce & Shan McSpadden, 66 Sandpoint Drive, Richmond, CA 94804
 John & Carol Noonan, 1609 Sand Court #6, Great Falls, 59405
 Mike & Sherwin Toth, 2464 NW Savier, Portland, OR 97210
 Ken Shesne, HC 50, Box 4422, Red Lodge, 59068
 Raymond & Marilyn Parker, 2504 Sycamore Avenue, Missoula, 59802
 Jean & Eula Mae Turnage, 1225 Highland, Helena, 59601
 Nancy Seldin, 1970 Alvina Drive, Missoula, 59082
 Bill & Beth, 412 W Arternas Drive, Missoula, 59803-1508
 Ken Yachechak, 157 N Meridian Road, Suite 112, Kalispell, 59901
 Jim & Barbara Roberts, 2520 Synnyslopes Drive, Park City, UT 84060
 J B Yonce, 5501 Rattlesnake Drive, Missoula, 59802
 Daniel Sherwood, PO Box 4632, Whitefish, 59937
 Nancy Romalov, 802 7th Avenue S, Iowa City, IA 52240

**Decision Notice
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for
Applied Fire Project on Wild Horse Island State Park**

Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Region 1
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

January 18, 2002

Description of the Proposed Action:

The proposed action is a pilot project designed to measure the usefulness and feasibility of using applied fire as a tool for enhancing the Palouse prairie/Ponderosa pine habitat type on Wild Horse Island. Management objectives are to restore fire periodicity, enhance native plant communities, decrease Ponderosa pine encroachment onto the island's grasslands, decrease fuel loading, and enhance visitor understanding of the role that fire plays on Wild Horse Island.

Public Comment:

Twenty-one letters and e-mails were received during the comment period with comments regarding this proposal.

The predominant theme of the comments was a strong support for controlled burning on Wild Horse Island. Seven of the respondents favored the preferred Alternative C, while three supported Alternative B. Nine respondents supported a more aggressive approach than any of the alternatives represented. One respondent favored the no-action alternative, and one respondent did not specify any preference, only his general mistrust of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

Below is a discussion of issues raised during the comment period.

- 1. Acreage to be treated is too conservative.** This proposal is designed as a pilot project to assess the feasibility and productivity of applied fire as a tool for preserving Wild Horse Island's grasslands. In the event that the pilot project yields positive results, further applied fire projects will be initiated.
- 2. Grazers will concentrate on new growth, causing secondary cheatgrass invasion.** Postburn vegetation monitoring will be conducted to determine range condition and guide further habitat enhancement projects.
- 3. Homes must be protected.** Protection of homes and private lots is a top priority of this action. A fire escapement contingency plan will be a component of any fire prescriptions implemented on Wild Horse Island State Park. During implementation, fire fighting equipment and personnel will be on-site and available in the event of fire escapement.

4. Mechanical pretreatment of trees should be used. The alternatives considered do not include pretreatment of Ponderosa pines. If postburn monitoring indicates failure to achieve tree mortality objectives, pretreatment will be explored for future burning activities.

6. FWP needs to pay special attention to lambing and horse use in acreage treated under Alternative C. Treatment will occur prior to bighorn sheep lambing. Burn activities will be conducted in as timely a fashion as possible to limit disturbance to the horses and other wildlife within the project area.

8. Pay attention to eagle nesting near Alternative C project area. Burning activities will precede the traditional bald eagle nesting period on Wild Horse Island.

9. Prescribed fire must include weed control. If postburn monitoring indicates enhanced noxious weed recruitment within the project area, control methods will be implemented.

10. The present proposal is too small and will increase the likelihood of catastrophic wildfire and broad scale weed infestations. Fuel loading on the island as a result of fire exclusion has increased the potential for catastrophic fire on Wild Horse Island. Fire exclusion, along with several other factors, may also account for an increase in weed infestations. This proposal is designed as a "first step" in addressing those issues.

12. Fire may not be hot enough to kill trees. Tree mortality will be assessed through postburn monitoring. Monitoring result will determine if pretreatment should be considered for future burning projects.

13. Thinning by itself would work better. Although mechanical thinning of Ponderosa pine trees has taken place in the past (1995) and will be implemented in the future, it does not accomplish the stated goal of restoring natural and ecological processes and conditions that once existed on the island.


14. Remaining fire lines are unacceptable. FWP does not intend to dig fire lines as a control measure for applied fire. Mechanical removal of vegetation (weed trimming) in combination with strategic use of topography are the intended fire line controls. The exception would be in the event of fire escapement. If this occurred, FWP would initiate more aggressive fire control methods.

Finding of no significant impact (FONSI):

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA), I find Alternative C, experimental controlled burning of a single unit during the late dormant period, to be the preferred alternative. I have evaluated the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

The final Environmental Assessment and the FONSI may be viewed at or obtained from Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region One, 490 N. Meridian, Kalispell, MT 59901. Please direct requests and questions to:

David Landstrom, Park Operations Supervisor
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 751-4574
dlandstrom@state.mt.us



Daniel P. Vincent
Regional Supervisor

1/28/02

Date